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SUBJECT: ERBIL: Water from a Rock: Drought and Dohuk

This is an Erbil Regional Reconstruction Team Message.

11. (U) SUMMARY: The Kurdistan Regional Government has officially declared 2009 to be another drought year. In an effort to proactively mitigate the drought's effect, Dohuk Governor Tamar Ramadan recently convened a conference to formulate a provincial drought action plan. But human and industrial demand continues to overburden the province's limited water resources. Despite proactive planning and aggressive resource management, more investment is needed to increase residents' access to potable. END SUMMARY

Snapshot of Water in Dohuk Province

12. (U) Dohuk's nearly 1 million residents, including a sizeable portion of the grain farmers of northern Iraq, depend on a combination of wells and reservoirs located throughout the province. Those sources are dependent upon rain-fed ground water, springs and the two major rivers that run along its western and eastern borders. The western half of the province depends primarily on water from Chambarakat (Mosul) Dam in Ninewah Province and the smaller Dohuk Dam in Dohuk City. (Note: The KRG recently began the second phase of a project that will link the western half of the province directly to the Tigris River, alleviating pressure on Chambarakat.) The eastern half of the province relies on town/village wells, as well as unfiltered water piped from the Zab River and a collection of minor springs, but those water sources have no major reservoirs. The KRG has plans to build modern reservoirs in the eastern area, but to date, has been unable to secure the funding required (an estimated USD 90 million) and is not optimistic that it will be able to this year. Due to the absence of reservoirs, most residents of the eastern Dohuk receive water for no more than three hours a day.

Dohuk Governor Gets Serious About Water

14. (U) Despite the rain that has fallen across the Kurdistan Region (KR) for the past month, the Kurdistan Regional Government has officially declared 2009 to be another drought year. In order to mitigate the drought's effect on the population, Dohuk Governor Tamar Ramadan recently convened a conference of all provincial government officials and all University of Dohuk faculties associated with water resources. That conference resulted in a 12-point action plan. Recommendations included beginning the process of water purification, having the KRG dig artesian wells throughout the province, building small and big dams throughout the province, and working closely with academia to "develop the DG of Water Resources plans for drinking water for human and animal consumption." The conference attendees recommended the creation of drought-relief action committees in all three provinces of the KR and a central committee in Erbil. Finally, the governor requested KRG permission for an emergency drought relief budget of USD 14,954,044, based on the needs of the province as determined by the conference attendees.

15. (U) Governor Ramadan convened a similar conference last year, to which many provincial officials attribute the province's laudable preparedness for the drought of 2008. The five Directors General of water resources say that population migration from the rural to the urban areas of Dohuk was greatly reduced because the province had a

comprehensive plan to regularly truck water to the rural areas, and to dig artesian wells in strategic locations. The rate of water-borne illnesses in Dohuk was significantly lower than years before because the DGs of Water, Health and Sanitation had a plan to regularly test water sources throughout the province and bar access to those sources deemed contaminated. (Note: The Dohuk DG of Health recorded six reported cases of cholera in 2008.)

Hoping for Rain, Planning for Sun

16. (U) Despite having an aggressive drought management plan, the reality is the demand on Dohuk's limited resources has long outstripped what appears to be a dwindling supply. According to the Dohuk DG of Agriculture, Dohuk DG of Water, and the Dohuk Development and Modification Center (DMC), average rainfall and snowfall in the province has steadily decreased over the past decade. He says that, although the western half of the province has benefited from the flooding of the Tigris River, the level of water in Dohuk Dam is still too low to carry the province through the summer without emergency drought intervention. Furthermore, the ground water on which the whole province depends, and the province's only backup for when drought sets in, is rapidly depleting. "Do not expect these few drops of rain to replenish our reserves. We will need another 3-4 years of above average rainfall to repair the damage caused by last year's drought," said DMC Director Engineer Mustafa Abdulkhalig. The artesian wells that the government drills in order to fill water trucks tap precious reserves of groundwater. Once the water table decreases to a certain level, the water's sulfur and nitrogen content become high enough to make the water dangerous for human consumption. Due to this topographic feature of

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Dohuk, DG of Water Jalal Jameel predicts that he will be forced to close seven artesian wells due to the nitrogen level. Overall, Dohuk's water resource officials predict that the province will lose an estimated 35-45% of its local water resources in 2009.

17. (U) In addition to affecting quality of life and health for humans, water scarcity has an effect on water-dependent issues such electricity provision and agricultural development. Dohuk has four pending hydroelectricity projects, each of which will depend on average rainfall in order to function. (Note: Dohuk is not connected to the Erbil power line. The province relies on electricity imported from Turkish company KARTET. The amount of electricity provided by KARTET is insufficient for the demand that exists and is both unreliable and, at six times the cost of local electricity, very expensive. Provincial officials are hopeful that these hydroelectricity projects, once implemented, will alleviate demand in the remote parts of the province that currently receive little to no power.) Furthermore, the KRG Ministry of Agriculture has 93 agricultural projects scheduled for implementation in Dohuk in 2009. Without sufficient rainfall and ground water levels, those projects may not be implemented and a critical part of the KRG's plan for economic development, bolstering and upgrading the agricultural sector, will be delayed for another year. While the Governor's drought action plan requested KRG funding to safeguard crops and livestock during 2009, those funds will most likely protect existing agricultural entities and rather than supply new ones. In 2008, drought conditions were so austere that farmers in the KR were forced to sell their cattle or watch them die from dehydration. A province that, for decades, had such an abundance of grass for grazing that it welcomed migrating shepherds from outside of the KR during the summer months, Dohuk was forced to turn those farmers away because the drought decimated any surplus that would have existed.

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